

The Morse Collectors

Set in 1942, *The Morse Collectors* follows the journey of two young children who seek meaning behind hidden Morse code messages inside their house. Shot on JVC's GY-HD251E HDV camera with a 16mm Zeiss prime lens, the film has qualified to be submitted for consideration in 2010's Academy Awards and has received recognition from critics across the globe. David Cooke, director of the short, talks to JVC's *HIGHWAY* magazine about the success of the film.



The main problem as with any film is finding the money to make it, David explains. The majority of the financing comes from Film Commissions, and we went through several rejections before Northern Ireland Screen granted us 75% of the budget. My producer works for a company called Hub Media in London and they agreed to put in the other 25%.

After searching drama classes across Northern Ireland, we found both the kids in our last casting session in Derry, David continues. The other thing that we needed to get right was the location. The film was set entirely in one house during WWII. We didn't have enough money to build a set so we needed to find something that was very close to the script. It took quite a while to find the right place but eventually we found Galgorm Castle in Ballymena.

JVC's ProHD GY-HD251E offered the team behind *The Morse Collectors* the chance to bypass the HDV compression and run a direct, uncompressed, 720p signal straight into the edit suite using Final Cut Pro's DVC ProHD codec and a BNC cable, enabling the production to be roughly edited on-set.

We had decided to do the off-line edit on HD Camera Hire's suite but when we went to see the company who were doing the on-line edit, Street Monkey, they mentioned that we could connect the camera directly from the HD/SDI output to the suite through the Kona HD capture card, David reveals.

This meant that we could bypass the HDV compression and capture the live full HD signal using a codec on Final Cut Pro's menus. We chose DVC ProHD but you could get uncompressed HD if the computer's drives are fast enough.

The Morse Collectors, which was shot over a four-day period, was in part edited on-set, which allowed David to work closely with the editor whilst filming on location.

The editor was on-set, capturing a live signal as we shot. This worked well for us as we were able to review the footage instantly and the editor was able to start cutting scenes as we were shooting them. By the time we finished shooting, we had three quarters of our rough cut completed, and I knew that we had all the shots we needed for the film and that they were cutting together well.

The Morse Collectors has been screened at more than 25 festivals, from Aspen to Chicago, and has picked up six awards, including an Academy Award-qualifying prize that has enabled the team to submit the film for consideration for the 2010 Oscars.

David concludes, At festivals, DOP's always ask about how we shot the film, as many of them think that it was shot on film. We were all very pleased with the final look of *The Morse Collectors*. The Director of Photography, Angus

Mitchell, won a Best Cinematography prize at HD Fest in LA last November, and I also picked up Best Director.

The Morse Collectors will be available on iTunes later this year.